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MUSIC HALL STARS OF THE
NINETIES



BESSIE BELLWOOD

MUSIC HALL STARS OF THE NINETIES

By
GEORGE LE ROY



LONDON
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FOREWORD

The Author has had a long connection with "The Profession," having made his *début* in 1903. His parents were both Music Hall Artistes and he made early acquaintance with many of the stars with whom from time to time they were associated. Later he himself appeared on many bills with some of them and formed friendships in several instances that lasted for many years. Consequently he was able to study personalities both private and professional from a "close-up" point of view. Changes in forms of entertainment and technique have come about and, of course, have produced their prominent personalities. It cannot, however, be gainsaid that "The Music Hall" of yesteryear prospered to a greater extent and held a wider appeal when it could call upon the wealth of varied talent provided by

THE MUSIC HALL STARS OF THE NINETIES.

London, W.6.

August, 1951



MARIE LLOYD

CHAPTER ONE

MARIE LLOYD

THE late lamented Marie Lloyd, or as she was affectionately known to the public and "pro" alike, "Our Marie," must surely occupy a place among the Immortals. She was the absolute consummation of artistry, able to portray with equal facility the Lady of Fashion and the Cockney "Drab" type, and truly earned the title of "The Bernhardt of the Halls."

Marie was born in 1870 just plain Matilda Alice Victoria Wood, in a humble street in Hoxton, her father, known as "Brush" Wood, being a maker of artificial flowers. Marie was one of a large family of boys and girls, several of whom followed Marie into the profession later and achieved considerable success.

As a child Tilly was always the leader in the usual pranks and would often dress up and act for the amusement of her brothers, sisters and playmates. In fact she made her first appearance as a performer with a minstrel troupe which she formed, entitled the "Fairy Bell Minstrels," and the scene of her *début* was Nile Street Mission. She then sang a song "Throw down the bottle and never drink again," but unfortunately History does not record whether there was an epidemic of "Drunkards' Remorse" or any sudden rush to join the local Band of Hope, as a result of that effort.

In due course, after several decidedly unsuccessful attempts to settle Tilly into various factory situations and following upon a few minor engagements, Tilly informed her family that she was going "on the Halls" and thereupon adopted the name of Bella Delmare. Her first Music Hall engagement was at the age of 15 at the "Grecian," a hall attached to the "Eagle" Tavern in City Road, London. Acting later upon the advice of a manager she took the name of a Sunday newspaper of the period and became Marie Lloyd. An engagement at "The Star" Music Hall, Bermondsey, came later for which she received the large amount of fifteen shillings for the week. Although she was then singing songs of other artistes, Marie quickly progressed and in the same year she was engaged at "The Oxford," a music hall the site of which is now occupied by a Lyons Corner House at Tottenham Court Road.

Within two years Marie was earning £100 a week and was well booked ahead.

Marie was married thrice, her first husband being Percy Courtney, a non-professional whose only claim to our notice is that he was the father of Marie's only daughter, known to us as Marie Lloyd, Junior, a well respected fellow "pro." Alec Hurley, a lovable artist with a sweet voice and a fine delineator of Cockney characters, next led Marie to the altar. A few happy years together followed but unhappily a clash of temperament between these grand folk led to a separation. Alec died of pneumonia not very long after and Marie married Bernard Dillon, a jockey and trainer of some note in those days, who died a few years ago.

Marie's later years were marred by ill-health and although her artistry was as evident as ever there were indications to those in her immediate circle that the little woman they loved was fading away. Marie died in 1922 and her funeral was attended by 50,000 people, a considerable number of whom were in tears.

So passed away a grand soul whose unbounded generosity to the innumerable "pensioners" she adopted and indeed to all who had a tale of woe to tell, left little in her purse as a consequence. She did, however, leave one thing that is of greater value than lucre, in the still persistent affection in which her memory is held. My own acquaintance with Marie was a passing one when as a very young performer I fell in love with her blue eyes and golden hair, and although, like thousands of others who fell, I quickly recovered, I am still proud to have been on the same bill with her. So, I feel privileged to pay my humble tribute to a great artiste and a woman with a heart of gold.



DAN LENO

CHAPTER TWO

DAN LENO

ONE of the strongest pillars upon which the Music Halls of the "Gay Nineties" were built was undoubtedly Dan Leno, King of Comics and Comic of the King. For he became known as "King's Jester" following a command performance at Sandringham before King Edward VII.

Dan was born in 1860 at Eve Court, St. Pancras, now occupied by St. Pancras Station. His real name was George Galvin and his parents, who were minor performers as "Acting and Singing Duettists," were known professionally as Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Wilde. Dan was a tiny little chap and was often stowed away in the chest of drawers when his parents went out. This habit of putting him in the drawer must have stood young Dan in good stead, for a few years later, his father having died, the boy, at the tender age of 4, made his first appearance as "Little George, the Infant Wonder Contortionist and Posturer" at the long-defunct "Cosmotheke" Music Hall in Bell Street, Edgware Road; the site has now been taken up by Paddington Baths. The engagement was a joint one with his mother and he appeared in a set of tights, made by her from an old pair of silk stockings and joined together to fasten round his neck.

On a later occasion she stripped the cover from a carriage umbrella and made him a costume from that. His mother married again; this time a Mr. Grant who worked as Leno, a name that was to make history in our business. Many were the vicissitudes and experiences met with by young Dan, and he knew what it was to sing in and outside public houses and even to turn a "cartwheel" in the street in order to gain a few coppers. At one time he performed with a brother as "The great little Lenos" and later, as the superb dancer he was, won a silver championship belt and appeared as "Champion Dancer of the World." The belt was eventually won by a contemporary clog dancer, Frank Leon.

Dan's first London engagement was at "The Foresters" Music Hall in the East End, where he sang two comic songs each night and gave an exhibition of his Championship Dance, for which he received £5 for the week. That was in 1885 and an engagement at the "Old

Mo" or "Middlesex," afterwards Winter Garden, in Drury Lane, followed and proved a stepping stone to fame and fortune. Dan had found his true *métier*, which was character comedy in the real "red nose" style. His number would appear, then music, and suddenly a diminutive figure would run upon the stage in a series of funny little jerks, a slap down of a comically shod foot and there stood our idol. A darting look here and there and the house rocked.

One title he richly merited was "Garrrick of the Halls," for not only were his characters built upon his knowledge of the types he portrayed, but his make-up and ability to convey that knowledge to the audience bore witness to his acting capabilities. Quaintly funny though he was, yet there was something of the pathetic about him. Later years saw Charlie Chaplin convey some memory of his style of clowning, for Dan was not only a comedian, he was the Clown of clowns and the very grotesque of all grotesques. From 1888 to 1903 Dan was an institution in the annual pantomime at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and there he entered into partnership with Herbert Campbell to form a combination that has never since been equalled.

Dan was generous to a foolish degree where a story of hard luck was told to him and perhaps because he had "suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune" himself, became easy prey. Following upon continuous years of hard work, tragedy overtook poor Dan in 1903 when he suffered a mental breakdown and had to retire for treatment for some time. His return to the Halls showed all too plainly to his countless friends that the beloved little man was not the Dan Leno they knew best. In 1904 Dan Leno passed away, mourned by all classes, and the many thousands who lined the route from Brixton to Tooting Cemetery on the day of his funeral testified to the affection and esteem this man held in the hearts of the people.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LUPINOS

I HAD almost written "The Lupino Family," but realised they are not merely that but a tradition with a capital "T." A tradition which the surviving members, and the profession they have so greatly adorned, must be very proud of. Long before the first of them came to our shores as an exile in the reign of James I, the name was well known in Italy where they were hereditary puppet masters and mimes. Georgius Luppino, unable to speak our tongue, was arrested as a suspect, but his powers as a mime conveyed quite clearly to the Court his actual status and he was granted a licence to perform.

In 1648, he played what was No. 1 date of the period at St. Bartholomew's Fair, Smithfield. The bill describing his performance is still in possession of the family. His son, Charles Lupino, spelt with only one "p," was some years later placed in the stocks for failing to renew his licence. *En passant*, I dare to invite some wordy warfare in suggesting that the aforesaid Georgius introduced Punch and Judy to this country as "Squire Punch," although, among other derivations, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* gives the choice of Puccio d'Aniello or Punchinello, a leader of strolling players in Italy who was probably known to Luppino.

Throughout succeeding generations the family has been a prolific one; each and every one has been well and truly wedded to the profession in the fullest sense, as all have married actresses, both vaudeville and play. Within my recollection George Lupino, who died 1932, was prominent in my earliest days when panto reigned at "The Britannia," Hoxton. He was a remarkable star trap performer and one of his more notable feats was to stand upon one spot and propel himself round in an astonishing number of pirouettes, while the audience chanted the number.

On one occasion he is reported to have performed the feat 270 times upon a pocket handkerchief. Barry, Mark and Stanley were his sons and like the father accomplished in practically every branch of the business from scene painting to clowning, and what superb clowns they were and are. Stanley passed away within

recent years but certainly left his mark in both film world and musical production. I had the privilege of playing solo in one picture, "Honeymoon for Three," and found him a very well-read man, with very definite views on the use of "blue" material which he told me was a comedian's S.O.S.

He married Connie Emerald, one of the famous foursome and a fine artiste in her own right. The daughter Ida is of course the celebrated Hollywood star. Another Lupino, Harry, married the niece of Sara Lane, the proprietress of the "Brit" above mentioned, and herself an actress who would insist on appearing in her own pantomimes up to the age of 70.

The union of Harry and Miss Robinson, the niece, was blessed by the birth of Lupino Lane (the Lane being added out of compliment to the great Sara). He is the "Nipper" we all know of "Me and My Girl" fame and truly he deserves it. His strenuous but unavailing efforts to restore the Gaiety Theatre to the scenes of former glory were not to be and must have made great inroads upon his resources. That great home of musical comedy is to be given up to offices and one deeply sympathises with Lupino Lane in the wrecking of his ambition. Mark Lupino was another talented performer of this fine family although he perhaps did not achieve the same height of fame as his brother Stan or cousin "Nipper."

Barry is still with us and apart from his own ability as an artiste is certainly very worthy of our note here as the authority, not only upon the history of his own family but also upon the real origin and details connected with the more remote and, indeed, most abstruse matters connected with the industry of circus or music hall. I gratefully pay tribute to the late Stanley and to Lupino Lane for much of the detail given here. Long may we have a Lupino to grace our boards. I have heard it stated that there will always be a Lupino as they are so numerous that to count them at one time was a good substitute for sheep in order to induce sleep. Long may they wave.



CHARLES COBORN

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARLES COBORN

THE Music Hall lost one of its stoutest pillars in November, 1945, when Charlie Coborn passed away at the grand age of 93. Colin Whitton McCallum, to give him his real name, was born of a Scottish father and an English mother, at Sidney Street, in the East End of London, in 1852. Upon leaving school, Charles spent his time in many and varied jobs, from City offices to commercial travelling in commodities ranging from furs to tobacco pipes. He first became infected by the germ of things theatrical when, at the age of 16, he went with his father to a "Penny Reading" from popular works given by a Mr. Henry Wainwright, a man who was eventually hanged for murder. Visits to the tavern-cum-music halls abounding in the neighbourhood became the rule thereafter and among these was "The Artichoke" Tavern, later replaced by "The Foresters" Music Hall.

Charlie then attached himself to an amateur acting society and having gained some experience with that body, decided that he was competent to stand on his own feet as a "Singer and Reciter." His first music hall engagement was for two nights a week at "The Alhambra," at North Greenwich (Isle of Dogs), where, for 2s. 6d. each night, he acted as chairman, artiste, waiter and, if required, as "chucker-out." That was in 1872. An "Irishman's rise" at 2s. per night followed when he went to "The Sugar Loaf," Mile End, owned by a Mr. Lusby, who afterwards built "Lusby's Music Hall," later renamed "The Paragon," and then, as now, Mile End Empire, a hall the writer has played many many times.

Charlie was then working as Chas. Laurie, but one day, whilst discussing a change of name with a friend in the street, the friend pointed to the name plate and suggested that Charlie could not better it as a pro's title. The road was Coborn Road, Bow, still in existence and, attached to Charles, the name was to make history.

In spite of the usual "candid friends" who told him he would never make a comic, within four years, as a result of an audition at "The Oxford," Chas. was booked there at once for a period of six months and became a real star!

His world-renowned song "Two lovely black eyes," a parody on an American love song, "My Nellie's blue eyes," and his immortal "Man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo" were written by Fred Gilbert, who was inspired by a similar title of a book, written by a Mr. Wells who really did break the bank. The last-named was rejected by Charlie at first but the melody was so insistent with him that, at three in the morning, he went to Gilbert's house and told him he had changed his mind and would buy it at the usual price one guinea! Eventually he purchased the complete rights for ten pounds, afterwards receiving from the publishers more than £600 in royalties. So much for the artiste. What of the man himself?

Charles, whom I was privileged to call an intimate friend, was a complex mixture of Scots dourness, yet breeziness; quiet, yet full of fiery magnetism; taciturn, yet genial and, above all, deeply religious, but with no time for cant. His duties as sidesman at St. Mark's, Kennington, and later in West London in a similar capacity, did not deter him after church from visiting his "local" for a pint or "wee hauf" with the best of them.

He was ever to the fore in all that could advance the interests of his fellow artistes and was prominent as proprietor of *The Music Hall*, a journal devoted to matters connected with entertainment. He was also a Founder of the Music Hall Benevolent Fund and the first protection society, the forerunner of the V.A.F. This was "The Music Hall Artistes' Society." Charlie was connected also with Music Hall Artistes' Railway Association and, together with his Lottie Coborn, who predeceased him, was active with the ex Music Hall Ladies' Guild, a very fine charitable body.

Charlie began with coster character numbers, but later gave some to Albert Chevalier and gave up working them himself. So much for a man who was a true gentleman in every respect.



HARRY LAUDER

CHAPTER FIVE

HARRY LAUDER

HARRY LAUDER was born in August, 1870, at Portobello, one of a family of seven, his father being a potter. Upon the death of his father, Harry, then 12 years of age, became a breadwinner and took a job as a "half-timer" in a flax mill at Arbroath. Some time after, the family moved to Hamilton where the lad found a job in one of the coal pits. Although he had learned only too well "how the shoe pinched," Harry was possessed of a natural buoyancy and found enjoyment in singing at his work as some escape from an otherwise dreary lot. He was then a member of a Band of Hope and it was at one of their affairs that he performed for the first time in public.

Other folks also were attracted by his voice as the years went by, and the calls for his services increased to such an extent that Harry decided that these engagements should be made to augment his slender earnings at the pit. His fortunes progressed very smoothly for some time, until one day he was enslaved by a pair of blue eyes and dark curls from under a Salvation Army bonnet.

Thus did he meet his wife to be, Nance Vallance, the 14-year-old Salvation Army lassie. They became sweethearts and in order to further his lovemaking, young Harry secured a job in another pit where Nance's father was a gaffer. A couple of years followed during which the lad firmly installed himself into her family's good graces with the result that permission was given for the young people to marry. Harry was 19 and his bride 16½. Lauder decided to become a full-time pro, and in partnership with a McKenzie Murdoch, he toured a concert party, parted with most of his savings, and returned to the pit. With an offer to join an established party Harry again essayed the path that was to lead him to the top.

Several years as a solo act followed, during which he played in towns over the border as far down as Newcastle. Dennis Clarke, then proprietor of the famous "Argyle," Birkenhead, gave the gawky young Scot much encouragement and several engagements. A life-long friendship was the result, and even when Harry could demand fabulous salaries, he would often go to play the "Argyle" for his

great friend for a salary that must have been microscopic by comparison.

In 1909 Harry tried his luck in London and, arrayed in all his glory, arrived dressed as follows: shepherd-tartan trousers, brown boots, yellow spats, coloured waistcoat, stand-up collar with large square peaks, green and yellow tie, tile hat. Overcoat with astrakhan collar carried over the arm, and props and handbooks in a carpet bag!

Harry some years later confessed that he was lucky in escaping arrest! A round of the agents convinced him that he hadn't a dog's chance of playing to a London audience, but one manager, to get rid of the awkward young Scot, took the address of his lodgings.

Fate then took a hand and the said manager, a Tom Tinsley, of Gatti's Music Hall, Westminster Bridge Road, having paid off a "dud" comedian, gave Harry a chance as a substitute. Harry appeared and was a riot. Before the week had gone contracts for some three years' solid work were his. Everywhere he played success followed and the U.S.A. and Colonies went mad about him. He could command as much as £1,000 per week in later years.

Lauder was knighted in 1919. Tragedy preceded that honour when, in 1917, on January 1st, as he was about to take the stage at the London Hippodrome in the "Three Cheers" revue, he learned that his only son, Capt. John Lauder, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, had been killed in action. Like a real trouper Harry went on to sing "The Laddies who Fought and Won," his current patriotic hit. Lady Lauder died in 1927. Sir Harry died in the early part of 1950, and Music Hall lost one of its most colourful personalities, the stories of whose meanness became a byword but whose generosity was well known. So the fine resonant baritone of the little Scot is stilled, the minstrel has sung his last lay, but no doubt Heaven and the High Angels are the richer for it.

CHAPTER SIX

GEORGE MOZART

VARIETY lost one of its most kindly and genial souls in the passing of George Mozart, who died two years ago, aged 82.

Born Dave Gillings, near Yarmouth, he played the drums at the old Theatre Royal there at the age of 9 for 1s. per night. At 14 he was a member of the Prince of Wales's Own Norfolk Artillery, and frequently played at the Palace of Sandringham. Leaving the regiment, he went busking with a band of itinerant musicians, but soon afterwards graduated to the music halls via the rougher type of house. In this connection he has recounted the strange habit of English, proprietor of the defunct "Sebright," Hackney Road. The audience would express in emphatic manner their disapproval of any act they did not like. English had long given up any attempt to control his patrons, but would mark his opinion of the "birded" artiste by sending for him.

When he came to English, who was in the bar, he would receive a thorough blackguarding and naturally would retaliate. Pressure upon a concealed bell-push would result in the magical appearance of two hefty "chuckers-out" and poor "Yorick" would quickly find himself propelled down conveniently adjacent stairs and into the street.

At first working with a partner, George eventually broke away with his burlesque musical act.

He was a clever clarinet player with a natural sense of fun and the ability to purvey it, which soon placed him in the front rank of the nineties. To within a few months of his death he was an active performer and during the late war did over 800 shows for the Forces.

One night during the first world war when he was playing the Palladium, he got in the train at Waterloo *en route* for his home at Walton. He was carrying his recently published book. Two young officers returning from leave were in his carriage and were discussing the shows they had seen. One stated that he had been to the Palladium where, except for "that fellow Mozart," the show was rather good. "As for Mozart, I think he is a rotten act and ought to be pole-axed." "Now the fellow has written a blasted

book about himself, conceited ass." George controlled a rising gorge until the next stop where, in the dark, he alighted. Thrusting his face through the open window, he flourished his book with photograph on the cover and shouted, "You pair of idiots, call yourselves soldiers? Why, I was one before you were born and they taught me observation above all things. See that photo? That's me, George Mozart! For the last half-hour neither of you recognised me with all your talk. Observation, that's what you should learn." And he stalked off in high dudgeon, only to discover as the train left that he had got out at Esher, some six miles from his home. He then made some observations himself as he trudged through the black-out.

For some time in later years George was proprietor of a small hotel in St. Martin's Lane, but it must be feared that his boundless generosity to many hangers-on seriously affected any profits made in that capacity. In comparison with the aloofness of some of the present-day stars in their attitude to the small acts on the bill, he was easily approachable and very ready at all times to lend a sympathetic ear and knowledgeable advice to any fellow pro.

He was a dapper little man, a bare five feet in height, but in stature as a good fellow he stood head and shoulders above many of his contemporaries. He has left behind a legacy of solid talent in the person of his grand-daughter, Charmian Innes, a comedienne who is frequently heard on the radio and who came to fame via the Windmill Theatre. It is pleasant indeed to recall memories of one whom I can state it was an honour to know.



ALBERT CHEVALIER

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALBERT CHEVALIER

ALBERT CHEVALIER, whose real surname was Ingle, was born at Notting Hill in 1861. At the tender age of 8 he gave the first indications of his interest in matters histrionic when he, one afternoon, descended upon an unsuspecting father who was enjoying a quiet pipe in the summer house and began to recite a somewhat doleful and tragic poem, accompanied by suitable, or what Albert thought were suitable, actions. The result was, Ingle *père* nearly laughed himself into hysterics and after he had recovered, secretly determined to encourage the youngster.

He secured the boy a place in the programme of a local "Penny Reading" and at the age of 9 young Albert made his *début* at a Hall in Notting Dale. Some years at school followed and he was then sent to a training college whence it was hoped that in due course he would emerge as a Roman Catholic Father. The idea was abandoned, however, and after some futile efforts to settle into commercial life, Albert secured a boy's part in a play with the Bancrofts, afterwards Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft, at a theatre off Tottenham Court Road, now swept away to become the Scala of to-day. He was then 15.

Some years of hard work in various plays ensued, and the many types that Chevalier was called upon to play during that period gained for him that experience and facility to portray them which afterwards was to place him in the front rank. Albert at that time had written several songs, among them "Our 'Armonic Club" which was being sung by his staunch friend Charlie Coborn, a coster comedian on "the Halls." It was largely due to Coborn's advice that he eventually adopted the coster as the medium for his art, and it says much for the brotherly feeling of Charlie that he thenceforth gave up working coster numbers out of respect for his friend.

Albert soon came to the notice of Charles Morton, a prominent figure in the Music Hall world, who offered him an engagement at the Alhambra, which was rejected because Chevalier considered his act unsuitable for "the Halls." Later he accepted an offer to play at the London Pavilion, where he made his first Music Hall appearance in 1891.

As he waited for Bessie Bellwood to conclude her turn and listened to the back-chat and chaffing between that noted Cockney comedienne and the gallery boys who loved her, he felt some misgiving as to whether they would listen to his type of number. His first song, the tale of a Cockney courtship, entitled "The Coster's Serenade," soon convinced him that they liked it and he followed that with others in Cockney idiom. He received an ovation, for he had shown beyond all doubt that he knew his "barrow boy" of the day as well as they did. Indeed, at one time it was widely thought that he had actually come from Old Kent Road.

In due course many other grand song pictures were "painted" by him, among them being "My Old Dutch," "A Fallen Star," "Mrs. 'Enery 'Awkins," and so on. The somewhat poignant story told by the first-named was afterwards made into a play and it may be interesting to note that I played in one of the adaptations by a repertory company at Collins's Music Hall in 1936. I have been saddened, sickened and disgusted more than once in recent years by the really ridiculous attempts by so-called impressionists to present what they fondly imagined to be a faithful representation of the great originator.

The "Mrs. 'Enery 'Awkins" song originated from a walk home one night when Albert, passing through a narrow alley, came upon a young coster with his donah under the subdued light of a gas lamp and overheard a word or two of their lovemaking. The words were written bit by bit and completed by the time he reached home. They went crazy over Albert in America. His faithful accompanist and part author of some of his songs was Alfred H. West, an accomplished musician. Albert Chevalier died in 1923. His widow was Florrie, daughter of that "Lion Comique," George Leybourne, of "Champagne Charlie" fame.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KATE CARNEY

IN January, 1950, the Music Hall world was left to mourn the death of a real old-timer, Kate Carney. Undisputed was her very lengthy reign as Coster Queen, and no other artiste so completely understood the type she so faithfully pictured.

We journeyed happily with her in spirit when she sang of roaming all round the country selling her flowers at "Three pots a shilling," and eyes were wet when she plaintively warbled "Are we to part like this, Bill?" two of many vocal cameos of the life she knew so well. The author was for a while privileged to be a member of her company some years ago and can testify to the affection in which she was held by a still clamorous public, although she was then approaching the age of 70!

Kate Carney, or "Mums" as she was known to the members of her company, was originally known as Kate Paterson, her father being one of a male duo nearly a century ago. She made her first appearance at the "Old Albert," afterwards the Imperial, Canning Town, in 1890, when she sang Irish songs. Incidentally, the stones used in the building of the theatre came from another Imperial Theatre in Tothill Street, Westminster, of which the famous Mrs. Langtry was proprietress. In due course Kate began to sing of the joys and sorrows of the Cockney in general, and the coster in particular.

That she had chosen wisely was proved throughout her long service to her public, and her reception even within some four years of her passing was in no way diminished. The ovations Kate then received were not merely the signs of a sentimental regard for that long service, but very definitely a just meed of praise for the ability that was still hers, even then, to transport us back to more leisurely and colourful times. The coster of her songs with his donah was then easily recognisable as part of the London picture, in striking contrast to their nattily dressed and more sedate counterparts of to-day.

Although she was an old lady when she last appeared, the entrance of that buxom figure gave no indication of the several illnesses she had suffered one upon another. Clad in a gown of gorgeous hue,

her head surmounted by a "cartwheel of a hat" generously trimmed with many coloured ostrich feathers, Kate stood embodied as the very spirit of Cockaigne. She was married while still in her teens to George Barclay, who died in 1944. He was himself a typical little Cockney who originally hawked bags of sawdust to the publicans and costers, but eventually teamed up with a Walter Bentley and went on the Halls as "Barclay and Perkins, the Brewers of Mirth." Both Barclay and Bentley afterwards became very successful agents, and owners of racehorses.

When Revue threatened to oust the individual turn, Kate Carney very successfully competed by producing her own, in most of which the plot, although hardly discernible, gave her the medium for her Cockney numbers and some spectacular scenes. In her last worthwhile production, "Crowning the Carnival Queen," her daughter Dolly, son George and several grand-daughters and daughters-in-law were engaged, and Kate sang of the delights of "The Cockney Rag," a kind of strut around the stage with thumbs in the top of the waistcoat, a catchy little tune and a crowd of coster lads and donahs to join in.

Then the audience let themselves go with "Tanner the 'alf a dozen," in which the scene showed an oyster stall illuminated with candles in glasses, a familiar sight to be seen up to twenty years ago when one could get oysters at that price. Then came "Mother, I love You," part of which was sung to her by her small stage son. A real "tear jerker" this, as our American friends would declare. "Somewhere in France, Dear Mother" was another epic she sang during the first world war. "Liza Johnson" was another great favourite. Indeed, every number she sang became popular, and the author in his professional capacity has proved upon innumerable occasions that the present-day audiences still love the songs this great artiste gave to them.

Kate Carney broadcast several times and her diction made her an ideal radio artiste. She was 80 when she died and is survived by sons George, Harry, and Dick, and daughter Dolly. A motherly soul who personified the kindness and chirpiness of the type she so beautifully portrayed.

CHAPTER NINE

ARTHUR ROBERTS

“**K**ING of friends and friend of kings” truly described Arthur Roberts, who for several decades was the idol of the young “man about town” and the fashion plate for the well dressed. Born in 1852 at Bayswater of good Devonshire stock, Arthur was the youngest of a family of five, his father being a tailor at one of the exclusive Savile Row establishments. When father died leaving them very poorly provided, young Arthur was about 12 years of age. He determined to help the family exchequer as quickly as he could secure a job and became employed by a Covent Garden seedsman. A regular visitant to his neighbourhood was an old man with a portable harmonium who induced young Arthur one day to help him out by singing a song or two. The outcome of this was that he offered the lad £1 a week to join him in a busking expedition to Yarmouth. Here they performed on the beach with an old door for a stage, and Arthur not only benefited financially but his lung trouble, which had been under treatment at Brompton Hospital, disappeared for good.

A few years at office jobs, including that of a moneylender, ensued until one day he decided that if he was ever going to wed the young lady who afterwards did become his wife, he would have to take a risk. He accordingly did the rounds of various singing rooms and having gained much experience and a correspondingly small amount of silver, eventually threw up his job and took an engagement at Greenwich. Arthur in due course arrived at the Oxford Music Hall as an extra turn, the engagement being in the nature of an audition. During the week Hugh Jay Didcott, one of the most respected agents of the day, saw him and interested many notable proprietors. Arthur’s money jumped to £10 a week and within a few years he was getting hundreds.

As a wit and a practical joker he was a master and in great demand even in Royal circles, where he was treated as a welcome friend. He became a vogue at the Gaiety where he reigned supreme master of burlesque. Kindly and tolerant as he was, he could not tolerate the harsh or intolerant. How he dealt with that kind of thing is

instanced as follows: "Trial by Jury," the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera, was usually performed in aid of charity each year. During the rehearsal under the direction of the great but somewhat irascible Gilbert, who was always a martinet, Roberts had been very rudely spoken to by him and determined to put him in his place. Accordingly that evening Arthur, who was one of the jurymen, took his place in the jury box, calmly proceeded to take his boots off in full view of the audience and producing a piece of chalk wrote on the front of the box, "Call me at seven"!

Worse was to follow, for taking a pin from the lapel of his coat, he solemnly proceeded to eat a plate of whelks which he had secreted in the box. Poor Gilbert was frothing and foaming at the mouth when the scene came to an end, with the audience in hysterics!

In 1926, and for 17 months after, I was included in a company entitled "Veteran Stars of Variety," in which I had much opportunity to study the man whose name, when I was a boy, was a household word.

His timing was superb and one look from a remarkable pair of twinkling eyes, a lift of his eyebrows or a slight inflection of his voice could prove devastating to the serious mood of anyone in his company. He died in 1933, and up to the last his wit was rapier-like and his humour inexhaustible. For some time Arthur was a member of the late C. B. Cochran's permanent company at the London Pavilion.

CHAPTER TEN

DR. WALFORD BODIE

DR. WALFORD BODIE rightly occupies a niche in our Valhalla of Victorian Variety. Of Scottish birth, he was Laird of Macduff, Banff; he died in 1939, at the age of 68.

Long, fierce and wordy was the warfare between Bodie and the medical profession over his claim to cure many of the so-called incurable disablements, but he was never daunted by the attitude of the doctors. He stated that only upon one occasion did he feel insulted; that was when a subject under hypnotic influence wrote a cheque for £1,000 which he insisted on presenting to Bodie "as if I were an hospital! *I am totally different from an hospital.* I CAN CURE PARALYSIS!"

Bodie commenced professional life as a conjuror, but later added ventriloquism to his accomplishments, using twelve figures and providing all the voices himself. He later ventured into research in the extensive subject of "Mind over Matter" and there can be little doubt after a perusal of his "Bodie Book" that his exploration was more than a superficial one. Spiritism, mesmerism, and hypnotism each came under examination and a fairly sound acquaintance with *Materia Medica* (he held an American degree) served to provide him with a strong foundation for his stage performances. Harnessing electricity to his use, he employed some huge and fearsome-looking high-tension apparatus by means of which he claimed to pass to the patient, via his own body, up to 25,000 volts.

It seems that the Doctor might have killed himself in order to get a living! Coming to London in 1900, Bodie made a triumphant appearance at the "Britannia Theatre," Hoxton, and I remember seeing the front of the theatre festooned with hundreds of sticks, crutches, irons, and other aids, which had been discarded by those he had attended. His methods were forceful, to say the least. Placing the patient under hypnotic influence, Bodie would reconnoitre the bone structure to ascertain the seat of obstruction and the best spot to manipulate. The limb would then be taken in his firm hands, sometimes there would be an audible breaking of bone adhesions. Sparks from the Doctor's fingers would be seen, and soon after the

subject would be restored to consciousness and totter, or maybe run from the stage, evidently cured.

Bodie was assisted by his wife, "Princess Rubie" and his sister, "Mystic Marie" Walford, and in addition to his curative treatment presented telepathy and lightning cartoons. At the height of his success Bodie formed a company to manufacture and market his "Electric Liniment" and various other medicaments, and friend Harry Coombs told me of an incident he witnessed when, homeward bound from his engagement at a neighbouring hall, he saw some students busy smashing the windows of the place in Blackfriars Road. In Glasgow the students tried to smash up his show. Bodie went on in spite of that attack and a lawsuit which followed.

In that his veracity as author of the "Bodie Book" was severely challenged, with the result that he was compelled to admit that he had never been to New Mexico in his life; although he had taken great pains to recount his experiences there. However, no author should be judged too harshly for taking some licence, although occasionally the accent may be on the first syllable!

Bodie was an impressive figure on and off stage. Immaculately dressed in frock coat and silk hat, with gold-headed walking stick, he had a fine face, a head of bushy hair and a luxuriant moustache of the Kaiser Wilhelm type. He was a superb showman and master of publicity without equal. Although somewhat austere at first meeting, a more intimate acquaintance discovered an innate courtesy and kindliness.

Whether or not he deserved the epithet of charlatan or any of the derogatory things said or written, it must be acknowledged that as a Music Hall celebrity he had a staunch following and was greatly respected by his fellow artistes for what he was, a fine performer, a clever and a good man.



JENNY HILL

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JENNY HILL

THE first woman to be acclaimed "Queen of the Halls" was Jenny Hill, who was also the first to be described *Comedienne*. Of very humble origin, her father a cab minder and tout, she was born in Marylebone in none too salubrious surroundings, her playground the street; her constant companions, the pangs of hunger and cold. While but a child she was found an engagement in a pantomime at the "Aquarium," Westminster, upon the site of which the Central Hall and Headquarters of the Wesleyan Movement now stands.

Later she was apprenticed to a Bradford publican whose treatment of the waif-like little soul would to-day have soon brought him into conflict with the authorities. Her day began at 5 a.m. with cleaning the bars, glasses, and scrubbing floors. At opening time, very often without breakfast, Jenny helped to serve drink and between whiles had to sing to the customers. Often, in spite of regulations, business would be extended to the wee small hours with Jenny in attendance throughout.

Eventually her five years' bondage came to an end, and in due course she got married to an acrobat who promptly deserted her when her baby was born; she never saw him again. Scraping together a few pounds, Jenny returned to London where she at once began the weary round of the Music Hall agents without success. One of the gentry with considerable booking influence became annoyed at the persistence shown by her and in order to get rid of her gave Jenny a note to a prominent proprietor, a Mr. Loibl, telling her that some extra turns were required by that worthy. The note stated that the bearer was becoming a nuisance and there was no necessity for Loibl to bother to see her!

Loibl decided after seeing the note to see Jenny, and what he did see was a pale, careworn wisp of a woman desperately anxious to convince him of her accomplishments and longing to get back to her baby who had been left in charge of a kindhearted neighbour. He decided to give her a chance that night and fortune was with her, for she met with a tremendous reception, the audience clamouring for

more. Jenny actually sang herself to a standstill and came off hardly able to stand. In fact, George Leybourne, the great "Lion Comique," practically carried her on to receive the acclamation of the folk in front. When at last she made her exit the truth came out; poor Jenny was nearly starving. Loibl quickly remedied matters in that respect, gave her lucrative contracts there and then, and presented her with the note the agent had written to him. Jenny read it and promptly fainted.

Her success from that time was, however, assured and she rose to eminence and affluence. Many and varied were the songs she sang, the best remembered being the tuneful "Maggie Murphy's Home." As a descriptive actress her marked ability was shown in her rendering of "Masks and Faces," an epic portraying the virtuous maiden's downfall and the punishment of the villain responsible.

A remarkable coincidence occurred in that connection when Jenny was playing the Canterbury Music Hall, on the bill of which house was also appearing a trick cyclist named Letine, who, in addition, was engaged at another Hall.

Completing his hurried journey from the latter in time to make his appearance after Jenny, he alighted from his cab clad in overcoat under which was his stage costume. He had paused to take a breath of fresh air when a wild-looking man seemed to appear from space and, flourishing a knife, stabbed Letine several times in the abdomen. A few minutes later he died and it was afterwards proved beyond all shadow of doubt that Jenny's rendering of the concluding lines:—

A stab, a gasp and all is o'er

In the play of "Masks and Faces"

practically synchronised with the actual murder!

The years of privation undergone by Jenny, coupled with the strenuous nature of her work, ultimately forced her into retirement and in 1896, aged 46, she passed from life's stage, greatly mourned by an adoring public. Her daughter, as Peggy Pryde, achieved some fame on the Halls and was the wife of Maurice De Frece, a well-known agent.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HARRY RANDALL

A NOTABLE figure and contemporary of Dan Leno was Harry Randall, a strong contributor to the comedy side of Victorian Music Hall. Born in 1860, he was intended to be an heraldic artist and engraver of precious stones. A true Cockney, he was born at High Holborn, thus within the sound of Bow Bells. At 17 he made his first appearance at a Temperance Concert and sang a heart-rending number entitled "Under the willow she lies weeping" and his services were secured gratis for the next concert, which was a charity benefit. To his chagrin he was then billed as "Funny Little Randall," a title that unintentionally but very aptly described him in after years.

Having equipped himself with suitable material, Harry decided to try his hand as a comedian, and the good offices of a pianist friend obtained for him a fairly regular place in the numerous "Harmonics," Club Concerts and Masonic programmes of the times. Friendship with an old pro, Sam Sutton by name, who was officiating as chairman at "Deacon's" Music Hall in Rosebery Avenue, then opposite the present Sadler's Wells Theatre, led to an offer of engagement at the first-named which Harry, after much hesitation, accepted at the salary of twenty-five shillings for the week. His reception induced the manager to prolong the engagement for a further three weeks and Harry was inundated with offers from other directions.

During his first real Music Hall engagement, Harry was proceeding home after the show when he was suddenly called upon by two shabby and suspicious-looking individuals to stop. Upon doing so he was told to open his bag at once and the two detectives, for that was what they were, stood off at a respectable distance. As Harry produced costume, wig, etc., etc., all concerned had a good laugh when it was explained that the men were really on the track of some Fenians who had been causing no little trouble with some indiscriminate bombing.

It appeared that, seeing Harry emerge from the music hall, they had even questioned the attendant as to whether he really was a funny man. The eventual demand for his services led to the engage-

ment of a regular coachman to drive him from Hall to Hall, and in that connection Harry has recounted how one night his regular man sent a deputy, owing to an increase in his family. Harry, in order to ensure that he would be on time for each of his engagements, asked the deputy, "Are you sure you know your way about London?" Like a flash came the reply: "Know my way abart London? 'Course I do, guvnor! Blimey! I bin in India four years!" With wit so plentiful a commodity in those days, Harry instances his friend, Hiram Travers, a pearly king comic, as a real master of repartee and relates that a certain agent who had risen to affluence was as careless of his personal cleanliness as he was his aspirates.

Having bought a racehorse, he was boasting of that fact to Hiram and complained that he couldn't decide what colours to adopt and enquired what Hiram suggested. Travers exclaimed: "Green and gold, same as your teeth." As Harry's experience widened so did his fame grow, and within a few years he was firmly installed year after year in panto at the "Grand," Islington, now known as Islington Empire, a "talkie" house.

Eventually he was engaged with his friend Dan Leno at Drury Lane, where he shared the honours for several years with the former, who was his great bosom pal. Randall sang many really funny songs, but the characterisations were more memorable than the numbers, perhaps with the exception of one or two. These included "Man, by one who loathes 'em," "You 'ave to 'ave 'em," "Drink, by one who has had some," etc. One song of a topical nature lived and died in a night.

This was an effusion dealing with a man named Piggott who had disclosed some letters which showed Parnell, a famous political leader, in discreditable light. The song caused a sensation but the letters proved to be forgeries and the police raised hue and cry for Piggott. The morning after his success with the song, Harry read that Piggott had committed suicide.

Harry joined a syndicate with Dan Leno and other stars and built Clapham Grand, Granville, Walham Green, and Croydon Music Halls, but lost money over the venture. Most comics in panto in his day used their opportunities to advertise local tradesmen for which they received much in cash and kind. One worthy very strenuously glorified the products of the chemist and grocer but was sadly disappointed when presented with seven pounds of Epsom salts by one and a bladder of lard by the other. Harry died in 1932 after some years of retirement, aged 72.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HARRY HOUDINI

THE poem declares that "Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage." Houdini was a living testimony to the truth behind that statement, for no man in his or, indeed, at any time escaped from so many seemingly invincible fastnesses of prison or manacle.

Ehrich Weiss, to give him his baptismal name, was born in U.S.A. in 1874 and was the son of a Jewish Rabbi of Hungarian origin. At an early age Ehrich was employed at a locksmith's and gained elementary knowledge of the mechanism of locks and the use of the picklock. That he added very considerably to that knowledge in after years is amply proved by the disclosures concerning his escapes made by his intimate friend, Mr. J. C. Cannell, in his *Secrets of Houdini*, the only book giving the exposures to many of Houdini's tricks.

Young Weiss was first attracted to conjuring after reading a book by a famous French magician called Robert Houdin, whose life story is still to be found on sale. As a result the "Great Houdinis" came into existence with various card and other small tricks, and engagements were mainly in the beer halls where Ehrich, or Harry as we shall now describe him, performed with his partner Hayman.

A disagreement with Hayman eventually terminated their connection and Harry was thrown upon his own resources. He certainly needed plenty of that quality, for he experienced many setbacks and hardships ere he was given even a small place in the scheme of Music Hall. At one period he was compelled to accept a job with a circus and became a sort of Poo Bah, his duties including the operating of "Punch and Judy," presenting his magic, and playing the part of a wild man captured in the jungle, in which capacity he was exhibited in a cage eating raw meat!

At one time Harry was so hard up and hungry that he offered to sell his escape secrets to some newspapers for a few dollars. Fortunately for the profession he so greatly adorned his offer was not accepted. An escape in later years from handcuffs in Chicago was a highlight in his career and led to other engagements in which his escapology

became the main feature. Houdini came to London in 1900, spending all his savings to do so, and his reception was at first very lukewarm until he demonstrated his ability to free himself quite easily from our regulation handcuffs, when people began to sit up and take notice. Important engagements here and abroad came his way and by that time Harry had so developed his knowledge of manipulation of every conceivable kind of lock and manacle that he was able to make the most astounding and daring of challenges and assertions, all of which he never failed to justify. Whether interned in an iron box, boiler, the last rivets of which were driven home in full view of the audience, manacled with leg irons and locked in a safe or a packing case, on stage, in the open air, or under water, Houdini effected his escape. In Russia, Cannell records that he was manacled and locked in a van which was lined throughout with zinc, yet he defied everything.

Naturally, Harry had several imitators, among them John Clempert, a Russian, and there was also a lady. Houdini's brother, Theo Hardeen, who was for a while his partner, also came over here and did a similar act, although he had none of the brilliant daring, the breathless suspense, and the masterly showmanship so inseparable a feature of Houdini's presentation. The exposure of fraudulent mediums was a matter to which he gave much time and thought, and he would often demonstrate that practically all the phenomena produced by those gentry could easily be produced by himself.

Harry was, however, greatly interested in the genuine mystical and carried on a lengthy correspondence for many years with his great friend, the celebrated Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle. The strenuous nature of his work demanded that he should be in the very pink of condition and there is no doubt that Harry had a splendid physique and stamina, allied to a Yogi-like ability to ignore pain and discomfort to an astonishing degree. That gift, because he was unprepared to apply it, failed him on one occasion only and resulted in his death.

Having heard that Houdini could withstand very hard blows on the stomach, a student who was visiting him in his dressing room at Montreal suddenly struck him several sharp blows which a few days later proved fatal. And so, in 1926, Houdini died and a master deceptionist, showman and a clean-living man left the Halls much the poorer for his passing. He was the greatest of all escapologists, and there has never been one to even faintly challenge his supremacy.



EUGENE STRATTON

Still in the Running.

EUGENE STRATTON

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EUGENE STRATTON

THE poetry of motion was never better demonstrated than by the feather-light feet of Eugene Stratton, a performer whose consummate artistry has become a tradition in the Variety profession.

Stratton was born near Niagara Falls in 1861, and as a boy put on his first black make-up. Later he became one of The Four Arnold Brothers and then a member of Haverley's Minstrels. He came over to London in due course with that troupe, but at twenty years of age transferred his talent to the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, a famous company then appearing at St. James's Hall, Piccadilly.

Part proprietor of the troupe was George Washington Moore, otherwise "Pony" Moore, a nickname attached to him on account of his ability in earlier days with a circus to drive forty ponies at once. Stratton eventually became his son-in-law.

After some ten years with Moore and Burgess, 'Gene decided to try his luck on the Halls and made his first appearance with white face, with no great success. He began to make better progress when he returned to the burnt cork, and meanwhile having developed a very fine and powerful whistle, he was able to give it prominence in the first of his early successes, "The Whistling Coon," written by Sam Raeburn, a friend and fellow minstrel. Stratton went on from success to success, but the zenith of his career was reached when Leslie Stuart began to write his songs. The ever-tuneful melodies of "Little Dolly Daydream," "I may be crazy," and the immortal "Lily of Laguna," helped to set the seal of stardom upon him.

In spite of the romantic atmosphere surrounding the latter, it must regretfully be recorded that although Laguna is said to actually exist, it is in the nature of a swamp infested with insects, and not at all the place where a Lily of any kind would choose to exist. However, the appeal of the tune will always compensate for any licence taken, and there is no doubt that of all the songs Stratton sang, "Laguna" is the best loved when community singing is being indulged in.

Stratton did not have a powerful voice but it was sweetly wistful and, coupled with his wonderful agility and ability as a dancer,

succeeded in captivating his audiences wherever he went. He could also claim a fine sense of the dramatic as instanced in his scena, "The Horse Thief," when he sang "I may be crazy," and, hunted though he was for the crime he had committed, he felt compelled to pay one last visit to his lady love. We all felt that if he delayed his flight for just a moment or two more it would be too late and he would be captured by the posse which was, we imagined, on his very heels.

"The Dandy Coloured Coon," "The Coon Drum Major," and "My Little Octoroon," were other songs that fitted this fine artiste like a glove. It cannot be denied that Stratton was a great artiste, but it is problematical whether he would have achieved the heights that brought him salaries of over £300 per week if Leslie Stuart and he had not met. Unfortunately, the association came to an end over a quarrel concerning racing matters.

Stuart achieved considerable success as a composer with "Floradora," "The Bandolero," and many other beautiful creations, but died a very disappointed man with very little tangible result to show for his valuable contributions to light music. His songs linger on and in doing so never fail to conjure up for those who saw him, a vision with ebony face, literally floating on his feet from one side of the stage to the other.

A worthy, indeed the best, exponent of Stratton's style of dance still performing is that grand artiste, G. H. Elliott, maybe slightly more gaily boisterous with his songs than 'Gene but undoubtedly the only man who could faithfully remind us of him.

Stratton died in 1928, but will long live on in the melodious memories he has left of an artiste without equal and one of the Variety firmament's brightest stars.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HARRY TATE

RONALD MACDONALD HUTCHINSON was a Scot by birth, and was intended to be a marine engineer. He was, however, in due course employed at Tate and Sons, the sugar refiners. His contacts with professional circles were made by way of the smoking concerts and similar affairs at which he performed in the evenings as a mimic. He came under the notice of Marie Lloyd, who promised to secure an audition for him at the "Oxford," scene of many a pro's emergence from obscurity to stardom. Remembering her own experience she urged Hutchinson to change his name to something shorter and, taking her advice, he adopted the name of his employer.

His audition duly took place, with the result that he was able to give up his job and enter the profession as a fully fledged Music Hall artiste. Engagements at the more important of the Halls came his way and he was then billed as "Harry Tate, the Marvellous Mimic," giving impersonations of George Robey, Eugene Stratton, and other contemporaries.

Later, Wal Pink, a prolific writer of sketches for Joe Elvin and others, wrote for Harry and thus provided the ideal vehicle for that supreme clown. "Motoring," "Billiards," "Fishing," and "Wireless" each provided him with opportunities to exploit his innate gift of burlesque acting, and laughter was assured whenever he was included in a programme. The extraordinary collection of natural eccentrics whom he employed to help, or hinder, was a notable feature of his sketches; and who can forget the supercilious school-master who strolled upon the scene of Harry's motoring breakdown, nonchalantly striking a match upon the car? Or the very squeaky, high-pitched boy played by his son, sitting in the back of the car with constantly reiterated "Yes, Papa," "No, Papa," or his many "Good-by-ee, Good-by-ees," although the contraption had not moved an inch nor seemed likely to do so? The fearsome gadgets which conspired to defeat the optimistic Harry, who was expecting to get to Brighton somewhere within twenty-five minutes of leaving town!

His loud check suit and cap, with that monstrosity of a gyrating moustache, were all designed to win our laughter, and they did.

Marie Lloyd suggested the moustache when she saw him swimming in the Thames near her houseboat with a piece of weed tucked beneath his nose, and it became a permanent feature of his make-up. Without it we would not have believed it was Harry. Actually, Harry was one of the early motorists and was accorded the privilege by the police of having his professional cognomen on his car number plate thus, T.8. The police all knew of this and Harry was consequently always upon good terms with the men in blue and indeed appeared at some of their affairs, in festive mood of course.

Harry Tate was a valuable asset to the box office always, but more especially in West End revue, appearing in such productions as "Business as Usual," "Razzle Dazzle," "Box o' Tricks," etc. He could also claim the unique honour of having appeared in no less than four Royal Command Performances and received several private invitations to appear before Royalty. At the former their Majesties were obviously overcome by laughter at his antics. Harry was an adept at the prompt and funny rejoinder, although he was without an ounce of rancour.

A good instance of his overflowing sense of fun is recorded. Hurrying in his car to reach a provincial town where he had an engagement, Harry ran over a cat. From one of the adjacent cottages came a woman who picked up the deceased animal and brandishing it in Harry's face screamed: "See what you have done? This will kill my mother!"; to be met with the retort: "Well, don't let her eat it!" Harry was a kindly man much respected by his fellows, and one of the best storytellers in the profession when in good company. His son, Ronnie, who has inherited the mantle of his father, is really uncanny when heard on the radio, his voice almost convincing us that Harry the elder is once again with us. One quality that he carefully guarded throughout his stage career must be mentioned. This was his ability to create continuous laughter with material and situation entirely clean in character.

We laughed at him and with him for the things that happened to him and were capable of happening to any one of us. Harry Tate died in 1940, aged 68. "A Clown Prince and a Prince of Good Fellows" might well be his epitaph.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BESSIE BELLWOOD

ONE of the most robust and tempestuous personalities of "the Halls" during the Victorian era was Bessie Bellwood. Born in 1860 plain Elizabeth Mahoney, Bessie's early years of a life that was all too short were spent in the Cockney atmosphere of Bermondsey and the "Cut," where she was employed as a rabbit skinner. With a natural flair for singing and portrayal, one of her earliest appearances was at the "Star," Bermondsey, in 1892, when she was engaged to deputise. The gift of a ready wit, the natural hallmark of a true Cockney, which in Bessie's case was allied to a wonderful fluency that cared nought for grammar or other such niceties, stood her in very good stead in circumstances which might well have dismayed artistes of lesser fibre. On one occasion the chairman, in his efforts to secure order, found considerable obstruction from a burly coalheaver who seemed determined to be a nuisance. Finding that the chairman was unable to obtain a hearing, Bessie shouted: "Leave him to me!"

Then ensued a slanging match the like of which had never been witnessed in Bermondsey. The little ex-rabbit skinner tore the character of the coalheaver and his ancestors to shreds. She threatened to wipe the floor with him and "leave the place respectable." Reports agree that strong men turned pale and shuddered as the torrent of her wrath poured like hot lava from her lips, and the coalheaver, who by that time could barely heave a sigh, turned in sheer panic and fled as the "atom bomb" of abuse broke over his head.

On another occasion, while dining at Romano's, she encountered a certain titled gentleman into whose ear she promptly sank her teeth, exclaiming: "That will teach you not to talk about my private affairs." On another occasion she had barely left the residence of Cardinal Manning when, overhearing a slighting remark passed by a cabman in reference to her male friend, she promptly knocked the offender down and gave him a thrashing. Bessie had much of the *gamin* in her Irish-Cockney make-up and that streak would often come to the surface, as, for instance, when invited to entertain a prominent nobleman and his friends she arrived and was greeted

very disdainfully by the bewigged and powdered flunkey in all the glory of satin knee-breeches and silk stockings. Exclaiming: "Blimey! Where did they find this?" she promptly stuck a pin into his leg to "see if he was real."

Vulgar she undoubtedly was and greatly addicted to use of "The Blue Bag" in her act, yet history acclaims her a really fine artiste with much of the talent of dear Marie Lloyd who was her rival, although Bessie was without that polish and sheer acting ability of Marie. In many ways she was the counterpart of Marie, with the same sense of pity and benevolence to the less fortunate. She literally gave away her earnings and frequently performed the most menial of tasks, even to scrubbing the floors when visiting some of her sick *protégées*. Bessie's greatest song success, "Wot cher Ria," told the story of a coster girl who, for one night only, decided to cut a dash and by purchase of a shilling seat was able to sit near the chairman at the local Hall. By present-day standards the song would be considered very feeble, but it certainly set the seal upon her success. In the song her pals in the gallery shouted:—

"Wot cher, Ria, Ria's on the job.

Wot cher, Ria, did you speculate a bob?

Oh, Ria, she's a toff and she looks immensikoff,

And they all shouted 'Wot cher, Ria'."

Irrepressible and unladylike though she often was, she held a firm place in the affections of her public. She died in 1896 and her funeral was attended by crowds as great as those which in later years followed that of Dan Leno.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LITTLE TICH

HARRY RELPH, to give him his rightful name, was born in a village near Sevenoaks, Kent, in 1868, of very humble parentage.

The family moved to Gravesend several years later and it was in this town at Rosherville Gardens that as a boy he made his *début*. While still in his 'teens Harry secured various engagements at London and provincial Halls. He had discarded his baptismal name in favour of Little Tich, a label that had been bestowed upon him on account of his smallness of stature and as topical allusion to the Tichborne trial, in which a fraudulent claimant to a large estate was occupying prominent space in the newspapers.

Pantomime soon claimed him for leading parts and he quickly established himself as the main comedy ingredient. When he first started out, he tried out black-faced comedy and dancing, but following a visit to the States reverted to clean face plus the usual rubicund nasal appendage.

Tich was a natural droll with a facility of expression and the ability to contort his diminutive body into the most extraordinary attitudes. Consequently laughter constantly punctuated his efforts to convince us that the trip over his train might happen to anyone, or that when the stick with which he banged the backcloth rebounded, hitting him in the face, it was a pure accident. Every kind of grotesque character was included in his gallery and one never saw such an outrageous duchess, ballet dancer, shopkeeper, or what have you, as he presented for our attention. For many years Little Tich was an institution at the Tivoli, the Pavilion, and Oxford Music Halls, and later at the Palladium.

To watch him against the proportionately vast background of the Palladium stage lent additional diminishment of the little man, but far at the back of the gallery his comical face and voice could be seen, heard and appreciated. Tich was a very clever musician who could play several instruments, the 'cello being his favourite. He was also an accomplished linguist with several languages at his command. A most interesting companion, able to discourse and hold his own on a variety of cultural subjects, yet he was a quiet, undemonstrative fellow

in no way conceited or apparently aware that he was a star and therefore a being apart from the ordinary man, as some of his *confrères* thought of themselves. Physically, Tich was something of a freak, having an extra finger on each hand. He was extremely sensitive, and strangely enough resented being called Little Tich. Nor did he like the undue familiarities of the admiring back slapper. He was not as temperamental as many of his fellows were, but on one occasion he uttered a strong protest from the Palladium stage on observing an occupant of the stalls calmly reading a newspaper during his act. Although his brief lapse from strictly professional conduct may have earned him some managerial reproof, he continued to reign time and again at that house.

Tich was a great favourite in Paris where he was as much at home as in this country. A regular feature of his act for the greater part of his life was the big boot dance, in which he used boots larger than himself and during the dance would suddenly shoot into the air and remain suspended, as upon a pair of stilts, on the toes of them. This was undoubtedly a very strenuous item and one which he had to delete in his later years. Chance Newton very aptly labelled him with a slogan which was always included in the billing of the little man. "One Tich of nature makes the whole world grin," said Newton and how right he was only those who saw Tich can testify. Consensus of opinion even in the palmy days of the Halls, when comedians were more plentiful and various than now, agreed that Tich was the supreme master if it was laughter you were after. He was honoured by inclusion in the first Royal Command Music Hall Performance in 1912 and never did a craftsman more thoroughly deserve recognition. He passed away in 1928 and heaven's halls no doubt are happier for his presence. His son Paul died some two years ago.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TOM COSTELLO

ONE of the most versatile artistes who ever graced the boards was Tom Costello, a native of Birmingham, of Irish descent. He was the actor, vocalist, sentimentalist and comedian *par excellence*.

His songs were in practically every instance enormous successes and the majority of them are still in demand to-day. Tom was, above all things, a master of detail, and not one of his characterisations was presented until he had woven into it all the accessories that were a natural part of each character. One can remember his "Strolling in the garden," in which he was supposed to be the young married man awaiting in trepidation the result of his wife's first confinement and having been turned out of the poor little bed-sitting-room which was the humble abode of the pair, he was hanging about in the rain "Waiting to hear the verdict" which was "One, two, three"!

For that very homely picture, Tom had concealed in his hat a specially made tin vessel which permitted the water contained in it to trickle intermittently down his face and on to his clothes. He wore a macintosh which was given a touch here and there of vaseline, so that when the water dripped on it the impression that he was actually out in the rain, as per the song, was very real.

His "At Trinity Church I met my doom" was another classic which never failed to raise considerable laughter, his characterisation of a man with a game leg and stick, stumping across the stage to express his indignation at the scurvy trick fate had played in leading him up the garden, or to be more accurate, to the altar with a female who seemed to have had too much of everything except the money she had misled him to think she possessed. That song, according to a statement he made to the author, lay in his bag for a considerable time, and it was due to an amusing incident happening one night in Manchester that Tom decided to include it in his programme.

Tom and another artiste were wending their way home to their "digs" after sampling a convivial drink or two, when Tom chanced to be humming to his friend a melody he had heard. A passer-by, who Tom declared was a very personification of the character he

afterwards used, stumped along in their path and as a result of the slight collision, he backed away a few paces and brandished his stick at the two artistes, mumbling what he would like to do with them. Tom and his friend mimicked him in retaliation, using the bit of melody which now goes to the words, "At Trinity Church I met my doom" (music), "Now I live in a top back room."

Meeting the same man the next evening, Tom apologised to him, took him and introduced him to a few glasses of much appreciated refreshment, and succeeded in inducing the man to sell his clothes, which included the "hard hitter," a hat which was a sort of hybrid top hat-cum-bowler, as worn at times by Mr. Winston Churchill. His "I'll stick to the ship, lads," was another epic and his acting fully conveyed the picture of the wreck and the heroic captain.

A cameo of different type was his "Joey, the clown" number, entitled "I was a Clown in the Christmas Pantomime," in which the poignant story was told of the old man who had once been the Idol of the Kiddies, and "was no longer wanted." This really fine character number was undoubtedly as finely drawn as "The Fallen Star" of Chevalier.

During the Russo-Japanese War, when the author first appeared on the same programme, he was to the fore with "Good-bye My Little Yo San," in the garb of a naval officer leaving to fight the wicked Russians. He gave us also "I've made up my mind to sail away," the tale of the optimistic emigrant who hoped to come back a millionaire.

Another comic study was that of the tramp who despairingly cried "What's the use of a ten pound note to a man like me?" in which he told of the threats to call a policeman when he tried to change that gift from an old and opulent friend. His *magnum opus* was generally considered to be "Comrades," a song which has come down the years and is as popular to-day as when first sung. Tom Costello had a pungent wit, and the ability when telling a story among his friends to so graphically decorate it with the mannerisms of the people who were part of the story that his hearers could almost swear that they had been present when the incident described by Tom had occurred. Unfortunately for the listener who was nearest to him, Tom would punctuate or emphasise particular points by prodding that individual here and there in the region of the waistcoat, so that to be in Tom's company for an hour or so could become a painful memory. In 1925, Costello became one of the Veteran Stars of Variety, a company with which the author had a very happy and enlightening tour of some months as one of the supporting artistes.

Tom Costello died in 1943, aged 80. In his later years the slump in Variety had left him among the unwanted, and his circumstances were such that his "Joey, the clown" song proved to be very true in his case. He was laid to rest in "Pros' Corner," at Streatham Vale.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

JOE ELVIN

JOE ELVIN will always be affectionately remembered as a very prince of good fellows and a monument of benevolence. To paraphrase a well-known saying, "his charity began a home," for in order to bring to fruition many years of untiring effort for the well-being of his fellow pros, he gave five hundred pounds toward the foundation of "Brinsworth," the Music Hall Artists' Home at Twickenham. Many old performers, including former stars who for various reasons have fallen by the wayside, have had cause to bless his name.

His proper name was Joe Keegan, his father being an actor who had graduated to the Halls, and as soon as he was able, Joe became a partner with him in a sketch act known as "Keegan and Elvin." Later on, Elvin became acquainted with Wal Pink, a very prolific writer of material, who became the author of several of Joe's more successful sketches, among them "Over the Sticks," "'Appy 'Ampstead," and "The Holy Friar." In each of these Joe had a kind of slogan which was reiterated many times, such as "I aint barmy!" and "I'm obliging my brother, I am." These were usually quickly taken up by the gallery boys and eventually passed into common use in the same manner as the present-day "Oh yeah" and "you're telling me," of our Americanised vocabulary.

His ginger wig and rugged but homely features were frequently to be seen at the West End Halls, where he was just as popular as in the suburbs, and in spite of his position as a star, Joe was one of the most kindly and approachable individuals in the profession. Consequently he was often lighter in pocket as the result of listening, as he too frequently did, to a well-told tale of hardship.

Some years before he died he was the star attraction at a Hall in the home counties where the author was also engaged, and from information he had received concerning the stability of the management he advised Joe to ask for an advance of salary during the week on the fictitious pretence that he was short of ready cash. He also suggested that Joe should request that the balance due at the end of the week be paid in cash instead of by a cheque which would probably "bounce."

Joe required much persuading to convince him that anybody would do him a bad turn, but eventually gave way. A cheque was proffered to him with the assurance that the cash would be in the bank to meet it. In spite of that assurance Joe had considerable difficulty afterwards in securing the amount due.

He was founder of the Grand Order of Water Rats, the well-known society which was actually named after a pony belonging to him and so christened in friendly derision. From that fine organisation in due course emanated the Variety Artistes' Federation, The Music Hall Artistes' Railway Association and the Variety Artistes' Benevolent Fund and Institution. Joe Elvin, ever to the fore where the interests of artistes were concerned, became very prominent in the Music Hall Strike of 1907, when the various grouped syndicates and concerns controlling the more important Halls were forced to concede more equitable terms and conditions, which were afterwards embodied in an arbitrator's award.

The close attention given without stint to the "other fellow's" affairs and the frequent inroads made upon his pocket resulted in Joe's need for a little help himself in his later years. A complimentary performance was given in 1923 at London Palladium, at which every star who could possibly appear did so in order to mark their appreciation of his efforts and to secure for him a financial anchorage in his old age. Sufficient was raised as a result to purchase Joe an annuity bringing him five pounds per week. He had then been fifty years on the Halls.

The author frequently met him, always to be greeted with "Wotcher, boy! come and have a tiddley," and Joe would reminisce about the "dud" cheque already mentioned.

He passed away in 1935, genuinely mourned by his fellows great and small. His funeral was attended by many of his brother Water Rats, he having been King Rat in 1894. He was laid to rest in Streatham Cemetery. The great sadness felt by the many who attended the last rites was lightened somewhat by the humour of the irrepressible cockney, Charles Austin, who solemnly declared: "Poor dear old Joe. Ah well, he had a good innings," then turning to the grand old man, Charlie Coborn, he enquired: "'ere, 'ow old are you, Charlie?" Coborn replied: "I am 83"; instantly Austin retorted: "Blimey! it ain't much use you're going home, is it!" Coborn told the author the story, and agreed that dear Joe Elvin would have loved that last comedy touch.

CHUNG LING
Soo.



CHUNG LING SOO

CHAPTER TWENTY

CHUNG LING SOO

WILLIAM ELSWORTH ROBINSON, professionally known as Chung Ling Soo, was actually born in the East End of London. In due course he took up his residence in the United States, where he operated as a "small-time" conjuror. One of the most important of the Vaudeville concerns had for a considerable time announced that negotiations were proceeding with the object of bringing over from China the world-famous magician, Ching Ling Foo.

Robinson decided to forestall the Chinese master and to make a bold effort to place himself nearer the top of the ladder of fame. He therefore went to live in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco, where he made a fairly extensive study of the manners and customs of John Chinaman. Meanwhile the protracted negotiations with Ching Ling Foo were completed and eventually Foo arrived in the States. He did not stay very long, for Robinson, who in the meantime had adopted the name of Chung Ling Soo, had presented an act in which, garbed in gorgeous mandarin robes and with magnificent stage dressings, he performed most of the tricks and illusions that were the important features of Foo's act.

From that time the fortunes of Robinson were secure and he performed all over the world. He was a most impressive figure with the naturally impassive manner of the true Chinese, and his mood was always the same whether on or off stage. The strangest factor connected with his adoption of the character was that the public, and his fellow professionals alike, really believed him to be of Chinese birth. He appeared costumed in the finest of silks, his attendants dressed similarly. He exhibited the normal appendages of the real native, with an expanse of naked scalp and a long pigtail. He spoke "pidgin English" and that very sparingly, for he travelled with an interpreter who would answer for him in most "conversations."

Many of his fellow artistes never saw him as his ordinary self for he was seldom "out of character." As an illusionist he was a clever performer and a wonderful showman. He invented many of his illusions and had a small factory at one time in Roehampton. He

died as the result of the failure of the mechanism of a rifle he had invented, from which bullets chosen and marked by members of the audience were fired. He would stand with a plate held before him, the gun was fired at him and the plate smashed, but he would catch the bullets. At Wood Green Empire on March 23rd, 1918, the mechanism failed; Chung Ling Soo received the bullets in his heart and the world of Music Hall lost one of its cleverest magical performers.

William Elsworth Robinson was not, as has been asserted, a Lancashire man, for the evidence elicited the fact of his East End origin.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

VESTA TILLEY (LADY DE FRECE)

VESTA TILLEY, born Tilly Ball, is universally and affectionately remembered in and out of the profession of which she was so eminent a figure for many years until her retirement in 1920. Other clever male impersonators there have been, but never one to equal Vesta Tilley for the sheer artistry that was hers. A quiet, almost subdued personality off stage, she was one of the real "troupers," very unselfish and always ready to forgo her own dues or comfort to help some other artiste.

Vesta made her first appearance at the age of 4 years at Gloucester in 1868 in male attire. Her father was Harry Powles, professionally known as Harry Ball, a comic singer and sometime chairman. "The Great Little Tilly," as she was then billed, came to London and at 14 made her *début* at the "Royal Holborn," a Hall later known as Holborn Empire which was badly damaged by enemy action during the last war and is to be converted to use as offices.

Vesta Tilley then became known as "The Pocket Sims Reeves," and played two Halls each night. Practically from the date of her *début* Vesta was in constant demand for Variety, which she occasionally deserted for pantomime, and what a principal boy she made. The lithe little figure with the swaggering strut which was and always will be considered the very pattern for all principal boys who wish to walk the stage properly, stood out like the giant she actually was in her artistry. She knew how to "dress and wear" the stage, be it Drury Lane or the smallest provincial one.

While but a child she was engaged at a Hall in Leicester owned by a very eccentric being named Paul who acted as his own chairman. On her appearance in male attire he stopped her performance and ordered her to go and get properly dressed. The audiences who afterwards worshipped at her shrine would not, I am certain, have recognised her in any other guise than as the immaculate male, and she was the Beau Brummell of all immaculates.

Vesta was a great favourite for several years in the Isle of Man and at one Hall sang to over ten thousand people. She also registered an emphatic success when she played in the States. Wherever she

appeared the local factory girls were always her most ardent "fans," although it might be more accurate to state that we were all equally slaves to this wonderful little woman. The author, during the first world war, had written a pantomime revue to be performed by and to his comrades at Christmas and secured from her the loan of her stage cloths which depicted a life-sized railway engine with buffet, etc., in view, which he had to collect from her chauffeur's home in Kensington, hiring a donkey and barrow to transport it to St. Pancras. Having seen it loaded, he departed for the Salvation Army hut in Euston Road and awaited the donkey's owner. The man arrived next morning, explaining the delay was due to the overnight enemy raid with heavy bombing, as a result of which, he stated, his donkey had fainted.

The cloth eventually reached the Army camp, when it was found to be too large to use owing to the sloping roof of the large hut assigned as the theatre. To make up for that futile effort, Vesta made a gift of a handsome gramophone cabinet and records. Her songs, like many of those sung by her contemporaries, can still be frequently heard, among them, "Following in Father's Footsteps," which brings nostalgic memories of the slim little figure in straw hat with cane, exuding mischief; of another girl song, "Who Said Girls?", "The Piccadilly Johnny with the little glass eye," "The Army of to-day's all right," and so on. The swagger she employed in that number would have rejoiced the heart of the sternest sergeant-major. It cannot be surprising that, lovable personality as she was, her hand was eagerly sought, but she succumbed to the wooing of Walter De Frece, a fine figure and handsome man who was head of a large chain of Variety Halls. Walter, or Sir Walter as he became, wrote several of her greatest song successes. He died in 1935. Vesta Tilley made her farewell appearance at the London Coliseum on June 5th, 1920, when Ellen Terry, the famous actress, amid scenes of the wildest enthusiasm, presented her with a palm. She also received from the management some volumes containing the signature of two million of her admirers, and it has been stated that the floral tributes filled two vans. A wonderful tribute to a wonderful little woman. To-day in her old age she retains those endearing qualities that have always been so noticeable throughout her life. A dignity without austerity and a sweetness that serve to mark her right to the title of Lady, in the veriest sense of the word. God bless her.



MR. AND MRS. G. H. CHIRGWIN

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

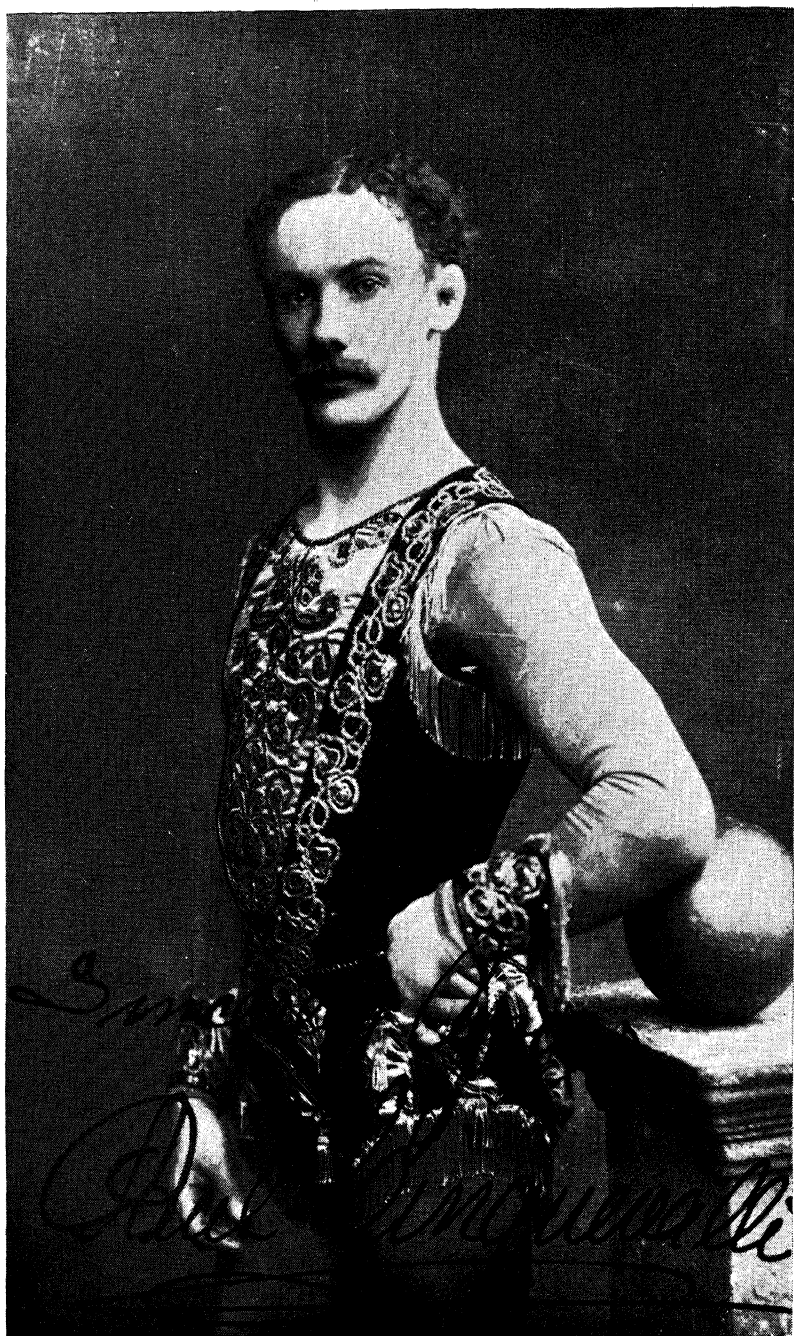
G. H. CHIRGWIN

ONE of the greatest favourites of Music Hall-goers of the halcyon days was Chirgwin, the "White-eyed Kaffir." He was the son of a Cornish boat-builder in the little town of Porth Leven, near Helston, who had been pressed into service by a travelling circus. The father stayed with the show for a considerable time, during which George was born. In his youth young George acquired a love for music which was to stand him in very good stead. He first performed to the public as a busker with another man as "The Brothers Chirgwin."

Many are the stories told to account for the white diamond-shaped patch over one eye which was a regular feature of G.H.'s make-up. The tale which has persisted is to the effect that George had made up and was about to take the stage when a fly got in his eye. He hurriedly wiped the obstruction away and made his entrance to a prolonged outburst of laughter. As a matter of fact his entrance always did create an outburst mingled with applause, for no man was more popular with all parts of the house. Clad in a long heel-length coat of white with an extraordinary tall white top hat planted askew on his head, George appeared at first sight to be about ten feet tall. There would be a sudden throwing back of his head and his white patch would come into view. Strangely enough, his hat never fell off. Then would come his cheery: "Wot cher, Cocky," and he would sit and discourse upon anything and everything; generously sprinkling his remarks with puns of remarkable daring and potency.

Daring, mark you, which had nothing of the salacious about it, but merely daring because of the extraordinary play upon words. He would then produce two clay pipes, with which, upon a tray, he would imitate a dancer most realistically. A weird contraption which he called "A Bom Bass" would then be used, and as it consisted of various strings, a bladder, and a brass cymbal, he really did get music from it accompanied by plenty of laughter. Then his *pièce de résistance* came, either as "The Blind Boy" or "My Fiddle is my Sweetheart," in which his unusual falsetto voice took the closing strains. He was indeed a most versatile performer on 'cello, banjo, violin, and one-

string fiddle. He had a daughter, "Clara Chirgwin, the White-eyed Kaffir's Brown-eyed daughter." Chirgwin left the Halls at the very zenith of his popularity and became "mine host" of a hostelry at Shepperton. He passed away in 1922 and his cheery "Good evenin', Ladies and Gempmums" was sadly missed.



PAUL CINQUEVALLI

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE SPECIALITY ACTS

Cinquevalli

PAUL CINQUEVALLI, whose act represented the acme of precision, was a star entirely without rival. Born in 1859, he was a German, his real name being Kestner. Rightly was he called "The Human Billiard Table," for his skill with billiard balls, indeed everything with which he juggled, was uncanny. The balancing of one ball on top of a billiard cue, and another ball upon the first one, always held the audience in suspense and his manipulation of a cannon ball, which was caught on the nape of the neck, was not without some danger. Cinquevalli was originally an acrobat and trapeze artiste, but as the result of an accident had to forsake that line of business. A table, set as for a dinner with damask cloth, etc., and a lighted lamp in the centre, would be cleared at one sweep, the cloth actually taken from under the utensils with just a sudden flick of his hands. The laughter element was not lacking, as the apparent anxiety of Cinquevalli's assistant, who appeared to be on tenterhooks during the performance of each feat, was a source of great amusement always. During the first world war, with feeling running high against Germany, Paul suffered from a boycott, and although he had many friends in and out of the profession, it was generally agreed that as a result he died of a broken heart in 1918.

Vasco

Vasco, "the mad musician," as his billing used to describe him, was always a welcome item on any bill. He used to play 25 instruments in 20 minutes, and claimed that he could actually play 50. He was the father of Bert Vasco, the genial manager of the "Metropolitan" Music Hall and who was once an acrobatic artiste himself in an act styled "Alexander and Bertie." Vasco died in 1925.

Blondin

Many have essayed the feats of Blondin, the famous tight-rope walker. He was as completely at ease in mid-air as on *terra firma*, and whether riding a bicycle with groove wheels, carrying a man across on his back, or cooking an omelette, he was fearless. He was a very popular man and he would stand upon his head, wheel a man over in a wheelbarrow, and generally disport himself to the wonder and fear of his audience. His greatest feat was the crossing of Niagara Falls, and he repeated it on several occasions. On one of these he carried a stove and cooked an omelette in the middle of his rope, which was 1,000 feet in length. On another occasion he essayed a passage along a 430-foot rope suspended between the masts of a P. & O. steamship, while the ship was steaming along and rolling heavily. He did the double journey without mishap.

Blondin, otherwise Emile Gravellet, was a Frenchman, born in 1824. He was a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. He retired, but resumed working when he was over 60. Blondin died in 1897, mourned by the many who had always found him to be the most unassuming and courteous of men.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE SPECIALITY ACTS

Hermann Unthan

HERMANN UNTHAN (1848-1929) was born at Summerfeld, in East Prussia, without arms, to his parents' horror. The midwife offered to smother him in order to placate them, until it was pointed out to her that even a monstrosity could not be murdered with impunity. He took part in the usual childish games as he grew up, and on his father's instructions wore no boots or socks. One night the family were sitting at supper and his mother was passing the porridge to another of the family, when Hermann suddenly seized a "fistful with his toes" (pardon the Irishism), and shoved it in his mouth. The father promptly ordered that he should be given a spoon and permitted to try and feed himself. He further declared that the lad was not to be assisted in any way, otherwise there would be himself to answer to. Neither would Unthan senior permit the boy to be shown any pity. With the utmost perseverance the armless boy soon found himself able to do most of the things possible for the more fortunate among his playmates. Naturally his disability made frequent calls upon his inventive powers, and in consequence he eventually learned to play the violin with his feet.

As might have been expected, in due course he found employment with a circus, with which he travelled through most European countries and in the Americas. Coming to England, he was for a considerable time a great attraction with an extraordinary act in which he played violin, cornet, and piano, painted, shaved himself, and fired a gun, all with his feet.

During the world war he offered to teach ex-Service disabled men in Germany how to use their limbs and was granted military rank.

He died in 1929, having lived a most varied and exciting life. A man with similar disability named Elroy has for a good many years entertained with a very clever act, and is still in circulation. I have seen Elroy, buying a drink for himself or a friend, kick his shoe off and taking money from it elevate his leg and place the cash on the bar counter with his toes. Simple! But rather astonishing to the onlooker who hasn't expected it.

Datas

Datas, otherwise John Bottle, was originally a worker in the gas works at Sydenham. Overhearing an argument one day in a local public house regarding the date of a certain event, John, who was quite a young fellow, volunteered the information that both disputants were wrong and promptly provided the date, together with other details which convinced the two men concerned that he was right. They tried him with other questions, and in each case he supplied the answer with little hesitation. By a millionth chance, one of the men happened to be an agent, and having learned something of the boy's background, spoke to the influential Charles Morton, who arranged for him to be given a try-out at the "Standard," Pimlico (now Victoria Palace). Morton attended himself, and as a result gave him the name of Datas and an engagement at the Palace Theatre, where the boy remained for months on end.

The author met Datas on two occasions only, the first some twenty-five years ago, the last about six years ago, when in the company of a friend, he was in a well-known hostelry up West. In walked Datas, and coming up to the author's friend he greeted him and, turning to the other, exclaimed: "Now let me think. Ah yes! Mr. Le Roy, born etc., etc." Needless to state that although he was then nearly 70, his memory was not at fault. At present he is in retirement, hale and hearty and ever ready to prove that his wonderful talent is as effective as it was when he first tried it from the stage.



Victoria Monks
Died Wed. 26th Jan. /27
9.15 p.m.

VICTORIA MONKS

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SOME LADIES OF THE HALLS

Florrie Ford, *née* Flanagan, was of Australian birth and one of the outstanding chorus singers of her day. Florrie had such a way with her, and sang her songs with such gusto, that even an audience of dumb folk could have been excused for trying to join in. In the Isle of Man for years she was a great attraction, and one's holiday there did not seem like one until an evening had been spent joining in the community singing of her numbers with the usual vast crowd enjoying that pleasure; Florrie's buxom figure and lusty voice dominating the assembly. She emblazoned her own baptismal name throughout the land with the song "Flanagan," and in later years when she toured her own Revue. A Mr. Winthrop (how he would laugh to hear himself labelled thus), who with a partner was a member of her company, adopted her name and is now the laughable comedian and greatly respected Water Rat, Bud Flanagan. His partner was, of course, Chesney Allen, now a prosperous agent. Florrie was married to a Mr. Barnett. She passed away in April, 1940. The mantle of that great and well-beloved artiste is to-day worthily worn by Bertha Wilmott, a chorus songster with a similar gift of voice and persuasion of her audiences.

Victoria Monks was another striking and somewhat ebullient personality, whose songs added to the richness and variety of Music Hall fare in the days now past. Her "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" continued to delight audiences long after its freshness had worn off. The author bought two copies of that song from a man who was selling them in the gutter. They were "pirated" copies, in other words they had been printed somewhere in an obscure cellar without permission or regard to the rights of the publisher who owned the copyright. Some years ago one of the two copies was handed to Victoria Monks when the author met her at Hampton Court. Other songs made famous by her were: "I ain't gwine to leave home in the rain," "Ain't I no use, Mr. Jackson?" and "Give my regards to Leicester Square." Victoria married Karl Hooper, an agent, and had a son whom she sent to college. She was as free and easy with her money as with her manner, and was somewhat addicted to the company

of racing men of a certain type, which did not enhance her professional prestige. Victoria passed away in January, 1927, at the too early age of 43.

Katie Lawrence, the original singer of "A bicycle made for two," would without doubt have been astounded could she have lived to see the wave that rose from the pebble she threw into the pool of popular vocalism when she carolled that song. It is indeed problematical whether there is a song to-day in which the audience so easily join whenever it is included in a programme. Written by Harry Dacre, who had many other well-known numbers to his credit, the author firmly believes that "Daisy," to give its sub-title, has been sung in every known language, including Chinese! Poor little Katie was in demand for a considerable time as a result of that song, but eventually found there was less demand for her services and consequently fell upon bad times. Help was readily forthcoming for her actual needs and she essayed a return to "Scenes that were brightest," but without success. She died in 1913.

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<i>The Spice of Life</i>	George Foster
<i>Minstrel Memories</i>	Harry Reynolds
<i>Fifty Years of Spoof</i>	Arthur Roberts
<i>Before I Forget</i>	Chevalier
<i>Our Marie</i>	Naomi Jacob
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